

Union Calendar No. 358

110TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 3548

[Report No. 110–580]

To enhance citizen access to Government information and services by establishing plain language as the standard style for Government documents issued to the public, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 17, 2007

Mr. BRALEY of Iowa (for himself, Mr. AKIN, Mr. BURTON of Indiana, Mr. MCGOVERN, and Mrs. BOYDA of Kansas) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

APRIL 10, 2008

Additional sponsors: Mr. REYES, Mr. CUMMINGS, Mr. HARE, Mr. GORDON of Tennessee, Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia, Mr. WELCH of Vermont, Mr. ALTMIRE, Ms. GIFFORDS, Mr. HILL, Mr. EMANUEL, Mr. MAHONEY of Florida, Mr. KAGEN, Ms. SHEA-PORTER, Mr. BLUMENAUER, Mr. SPACE, Mr. MORAN of Virginia, Mrs. DAVIS of California, Mr. BOSWELL, Mr. DAVIS of Illinois, Ms. SUTTON, Mr. LANTOS, Mr. BARROW, Mr. UDALL of Colorado, Mr. TOWNS, Ms. BEAN, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mr. HODES, and Mr. LEWIS of Georgia

APRIL 10, 2008

Reported with an amendment, committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union, and ordered to be printed

[Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert the part printed in italic]

[For text of the introduced bill, see bill as introduced on September 17, 2007]

A BILL

To enhance citizen access to Government information and services by establishing plain language as the standard style for Government documents issued to the public, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
 2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 *This Act may be cited as the “Plain Language in Gov-*
 5 *ernment Communications Act of 2008”.*

6 **SEC. 2. PURPOSE.**

7 *The purpose of this Act is to improve the Federal Gov-*
 8 *ernment’s effectiveness and accountability to the public by*
 9 *promoting clear communication that the public can under-*
 10 *stand and use.*

11 **SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

12 *In this Act:*

13 (1) *AGENCY.*—*The term “agency” means an Ex-*
 14 *ecutive agency, as that term is defined in section 105*
 15 *of title 5, United States Code.*

16 (2) *PLAIN LANGUAGE.*—*The term “plain lan-*
 17 *guage” means language that the intended audience*
 18 *can readily understand and use because it is clear,*

1 *concise, well-organized, and follows other best prac-*
2 *tices of plain language writing.*

3 **SEC. 4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF FEDERAL AGENCIES.**

4 *(a) REQUIREMENT TO USE PLAIN LANGUAGE IN NEW*
5 *DOCUMENTS.—Within one year after the date of the enact-*
6 *ment of this Act, each agency—*

7 *(1) shall use plain language in any covered doc-*
8 *ument of the agency issued or substantially revised*
9 *after the date of the enactment of this Act;*

10 *(2) may use plain language in any revision of*
11 *a covered document issued on or before such date; and*

12 *(3) shall, to the maximum extent practicable,*
13 *preserve and enhance the role of English by using the*
14 *English language in all covered documents.*

15 *(b) GUIDANCE.—In implementing subsection (a), an*
16 *agency may follow either the guidance of the Plain English*
17 *Handbook, published by the Securities and Exchange Com-*
18 *mission, or the Federal Plain Language Guidelines. If any*
19 *agency has its own plain language guidance, the agency*
20 *may use that guidance, as long as it is consistent with the*
21 *Federal Plain Language Guidelines, the Plain English*
22 *Handbook, published by the Securities and Exchange Com-*
23 *mission, and the recommendations made by the Comptroller*
24 *General under section 5(c).*

1 (c) *ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS RELATING TO USE OF*
 2 *ENGLISH LANGUAGE.*—*Nothing in this Act shall be con-*
 3 *strued—*

4 (1) *to prohibit the use of a language other than*
 5 *English;*

6 (2) *to limit the preservation or use of Native*
 7 *Alaskan or Native American languages (as defined in*
 8 *the Native American Languages Act);*

9 (3) *to disparage any language or discourage any*
 10 *person from learning or using a language; or*

11 (4) *to be inconsistent with the Constitution of the*
 12 *United States.*

13 (d) *COVERED DOCUMENT.*—*In this section, the term*
 14 *“covered document”—*

15 (1) *means any document that explains how to*
 16 *obtain a benefit or service or file taxes, or that is rel-*
 17 *evant to obtaining a benefit or service or filing taxes;*
 18 *and*

19 (2) *includes, whether in paper or electronic form,*
 20 *a letter, publication, form, notice, or instruction but*
 21 *does not include a regulation.*

22 (e) *USE OF PLAIN LANGUAGE BY AGENCIES.*—*Each*
 23 *agency should, to the extent practicable and appropriate,*
 24 *use plain language in any collection of information (as de-*

1 *fined in section 3502(3)(A)(i) of title 44, United States*
2 *Code).*

3 (f) *INCORPORATION OF COMPTROLLER GENERAL REC-*
4 *OMMENDATIONS.*—*Upon issuance of the report provided by*
5 *the Comptroller General under section 5(c), the Federal*
6 *Plain Language Guidelines and the Plain English Hand-*
7 *book published by the Securities and Exchange Commission*
8 *shall be updated to incorporate the recommendations made*
9 *by the Comptroller General.*

10 **SEC. 5. REPORTS TO CONGRESS.**

11 (a) *INITIAL REPORT.*—*Within six months after the*
12 *date of the enactment of this Act, the head of each agency*
13 *shall submit to the Committee on Oversight and Govern-*
14 *ment Reform of the House of Representatives and the Com-*
15 *mittee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of*
16 *the Senate a report that describes how the agency intends*
17 *to meet the following objectives:*

18 (1) *Communicating the requirements of this Act*
19 *to agency employees.*

20 (2) *Training agency employees to write in plain*
21 *language.*

22 (3) *Meeting the deadline set forth in section 4(a).*

23 (4) *Ensuring ongoing compliance with the re-*
24 *quirements of this Act.*

1 (5) *Designating a senior official to be responsible*
 2 *for implementing the requirements of this Act.*

3 (6) *Using, to the extent practicable and appro-*
 4 *priate, plain language in regulations promulgated by*
 5 *the agency.*

6 (b) *ANNUAL AND OTHER REPORTS.—*

7 (1) *The head of each agency shall submit to the*
 8 *Committee on Oversight and Government Reform of*
 9 *the House of Representatives and the Committee on*
 10 *Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the*
 11 *Senate a report on—*

12 (A) *compliance with this Act; and*

13 (B) *the agency's continued efforts to meet*
 14 *the objectives specified in subsection (a).*

15 (2) *A report under this subsection shall be sub-*
 16 *mitted—*

17 (A) *annually for the first two years after*
 18 *the date of the enactment of this Act; and*

19 (B) *once every three years thereafter.*

20 (c) *EVALUATION AND REPORT BY COMPTROLLER GEN-*
 21 *ERAL.—Within six months after the date of the enactment*
 22 *of this Act, the Comptroller General shall evaluate existing*
 23 *guidance for agencies on writing in plain language, includ-*
 24 *ing the guidance listed in section 4(b), and provide to the*
 25 *Office of Management and Budget, the Committee on Over-*

1 *sight and Government Reform of the House of Representa-*
2 *tives, and the Committee on Homeland Security and Gov-*
3 *ernmental Affairs of the Senate a report providing rec-*
4 *ommendations on—*

- 5 (1) *plain language guidelines; and*
6 (2) *best practices for plain language.*

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